

Some
Quaker Approaches
to the
Race Problem



AMERICAN FRIENDS SERVICE COMMITTEE

NO TASK that lies before the world today is so fundamental or so urgent as that of converting the brotherhood of man from a respected phrase to a living practice. The achievement of harmony and good feeling as well as economic and social justice among people of diverse races and creeds lies at the very root of peace. Without it even the best planned international political organization will rest on shaky foundations.

The time is short. Though thoughtful Americans are increasingly aware of the dangerous gap between our professions of democracy and our actual treatment of certain minority groups, we cannot afford to wait for change to come through a slow gathering of momentum. The resentment of those who are discriminated against is rising, and the determination of selfish and prejudiced interests is hardening. An eruption of force would bring tragedy. Change through growth in understanding, through voluntary association and active good will must be accelerated.

It is significant that no question comes to the AFSC with more anxious and steady persistence than the one: what are you doing about the race problem?

In one sense all of the work of the American Friends Service Committee, based as it is upon the Quaker belief in the divine spark in every human soul, has a bearing upon the race problem. Its relief programs reach out to those who suffer, without regard to their nationality, race, creed, or politics. Its educational and service projects for young people are open to all without discrimination, and the message which they embody includes the necessity for interracial harmony and justice.

On the staff of the Service Committee Japanese Americans, Negroes, Chinese and Caucasians work together in harmony, as do Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews and Buddhists. There is no segregation, no friction, and no awkwardness. They go out to lunch together, have desks in the same offices, and, as occasion arises, take field trips together. Above all, they worship together in the regular Wednesday morning meetings for worship held for the staff. The Committee has found that when people of different backgrounds meet together and wait in the silence for the voice of the Spirit, they tend to lose sight of their differences and to "know one another in that which is eternal."

Beyond this basic attitude, the Committee has made some direct approaches to the problems of race relations which, though small and, some of them, still in the experimental stage, might serve as sign-posts or growing points.

THE RACE RELATIONS COMMITTEE

The thirteen million Negroes in the United States, though technically free, are actually bound and hampered by economic injustice and social discrimination and segregation. The Society of Friends, in its early days an outspoken champion of freedom for the Negro slave, has become increasingly and uneasily aware of inconsistencies and failures in its present-day practices. With a good deal of heart-searching it is examining critically its modern testimony on race. It is appropriate that the AFSC should also concern itself with the problem of the Negro, or, to speak more accurately, with the problem of the white man and his attitude toward the colored races. To this end a Committee on Race Relations was set up in 1944 to plan a national program and to work in close cooperation with the local program of the Race Relations Committee of the two Philadelphia yearly meetings.

In 1945, with the appointment of G. James Fleming, formerly regional director of the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices, as secretary of its Race Relations Committee, the AFSC expanded its program in this vital field. In addition to projects already in preparation, important new ones specifically designed to improve race relations have been instituted.

The Race Relations Committee also seeks to help the other sections of the AFSC to keep alert to opportunities for both utilizing and serving persons of every race, creed, color and nationality. Thus the promoting of interracial harmony is not merely the work of one specialized department of the AFSC but a concern which pervades all of its thought and which finds expression in all of its activities.

THE VISITING LECTURESHIP

Because white young people have few opportunities to meet educated and professional Negroes, their idea of the Negro is usually distorted and incomplete. Accustomed to encountering Negroes only in positions of social inferiority, they are ill at ease and self-conscious when they meet colored people of their own intellectual status. To meet this situation, the Committee has established a lectureship which makes Negro scholars well known in their own fields available to white schools and colleges, to

conduct classes in their own subjects, to meet with informal gatherings and to live for a week or more on the campus. In this way lecturer, students, faculty, and, often, townspeople learn more of one another and their respective ways and problems.

The first holder of this lectureship was William J. Faulkner, Dean of the Chapel and Religious Life at Fisk University and Meharry Medical College, Nashville, Tenn. During the winter and spring of 1945 he visited some fourteen schools and colleges in the East and mid-West and spoke to more than 13,000 persons. Spending from three to ten days at each place, he lectured to classes in Literature, History and the Bible. Both in class and in informal discussion periods the students had the opportunity of meeting a "wise and sweet-spirited man" who had climbed high enough on the spiritual ladder to look objectively on the difficulties of his people and see them without either bitterness or evasion.

The success of the first year led to the appointment of two lecturers in the second year. They were Dr. Ira DeA. Reid, chairman of the Atlanta University Sociology Department and associate director of the Southern Regional Council, and Dr. Milton S. J. Wright, chairman of the Department of Political Science and Economics at Wilberforce University, Xenia, Ohio. Among the institutions which they visited, in addition to the Quaker schools and colleges near Philadelphia, were: Pennsylvania State College, the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Skidmore College, Franklin and Marshall College, Drake University, Bucknell University, William Penn College, Coe College, and Earlham College. The titles of their lectures included: Migrations in the United States, The Modern City and its People, Economic Influences in International Affairs, the People's Case against Imperialism, Religion as an Influence in National and World Affairs.

THE PLACEMENT SERVICE

In the autumn of 1945 the Committee established a placement service, which seeks to find positions for Negroes of superior promise and proven ability in fields not traditionally open to them, where they can put their talents and experience to the fullest use, and where they can work harmoniously and productively with people of other racial backgrounds and similar training. It is not a conventional employment bureau. The Placement Service is an experiment in the integration of Negroes and white persons in occupations where they have not hitherto had the opportunity of working

together. The Service is also prepared to help and counsel employers in the techniques of introducing Negro employees into new fields.

At the time of writing, the foundations of this service are still being laid. Files and records are being set up, interviews held, the office force enlarged to handle applications, references, and the voluminous correspondence involved. Most important of all is the extensive program of interpretation and information which the secretary of the Placement Service has undertaken. Because this is essentially a pioneering venture, the method of John Woolman has been used: direct personal visits to key people in both education and industry, to explain the service to them and to discuss with them its problems and the possibilities which it holds.

Visits have been made to 16 Negro colleges and to a number of predominantly white colleges and universities where Negro students are enrolled, in order to set the placement service before faculty and students, to interview students, and to stimulate college placement bureaus to make their recommendations to employers on the basis of qualification rather than race. In Philadelphia, executives in a number of commercial and manufacturing firms have been visited and the principle of non-discriminatory employment set before them.

Fundamental and essential as such educational work is, the secretary of the Placement Service is convinced that "No propaganda is as effective as the propaganda of the deed." The primary purpose is to find and to fill employment openings.

HOUSING

The effect of poor housing upon the development of those who are crowded into dilapidated and unsanitary homes is too well known to need discussion here. At all times, but especially in periods of shortage when housing everywhere is competitive, the Negro gets the worst house and pays proportionately the highest for it.

The AFSC is cooperating with Flanner House of Indianapolis in an educational program to prepare the tenant community for a self-help housing project, Flanner Homes, for Negroes in that city. Through the combined efforts of business leaders, social agencies and government, the clearing of the city's worst slums has been initiated. Some of this land will be set aside for a self-help housing project for Negro families who can do a large part of the building themselves.

This project arises out of the Committee's successful experiment with self-help housing at Penn-Craft. In that mining community in Pennsylvania, 50 families, of whom five are Negroes, helped one another to build attractive stone and frame houses through a man-hour system of labor exchange. The AFSC provided each family with a loan of \$2000 for materials. The first homesteader to pay off his loan, well ahead of schedule, was a Negro.

In Philadelphia the Committee has given counsel and assistance in some small interracial cooperative housing developments and looks forward to more extended work of this kind as the way opens.

COUNSELING

The secretary of the Race Relations Committee has been asked by groups of representative citizens in several cities to meet with them either to analyze a tangled situation or to make suggestions for organizing better race relations. The combination of a community genuinely seeking a solution and an experienced and resourceful counselor from the outside has resulted in fresh insights and some progress. The solution in one case led to the employment of a Negro social service worker who passed highest in the Civil Service examination but could not get a job; in another, to the establishment of an interracial church; in another, the bridging of a gulf between two factional groups; and in a fourth, some adjustments in a school system where the Negro pupils were neither integrated nor wholly segregated, but suffered by having class periods substantially shorter than white pupils.

Such a service is informal and unpremeditated. It holds possibilities for increasing usefulness as community concern for race deepens and the availability of the AFSC for this service becomes better known.

WORK CAMPS

Over a period of ten years the Committee has developed its summer work camps for a two-fold purpose to provide material help and human fellowship in situations where the misery of need is aggravated by a sense of injustice or neglect, and to offer ways in which young men and women may give of their strength and good will for the benefit of others and in so doing may see the conditions under which less privileged groups must live.

Several of the work camps since 1942 have been planned especially to deal with interracial situations, and most of these have had Negro members, though not so many have applied as the Committee would have welcomed.

The year-round work camp at Flanner House, in Indianapolis, has been operating since 1942. It is augmented by summer groups in which there have been Negroes, Caucasians, Mexicans, Japanese and Chinese Americans. They live in a cooperative household, and work on the landscaping of the neighborhood house grounds, in the vegetable garden, the self-help cannery, and the playground; some of them helped to make a survey of the neighborhood in preparation for the new self-help housing project.

The comments of the campers show clearly the value of this kind of opportunity for association with persons of other races. A white student wrote: "The most significant part of this work camp experience has been meeting the wonderful colored leaders and people of Indianapolis on an equal basis." A Negro student reported: "We were knit together by bonds which forgot race, creed, and color. We learned from close contact to think of each other as individuals without racial identity entering into our evaluations of each other. For a Negro girl from a southern community my experiences at work camp were my first insight into what democracy can really mean."

The AFSC's first interracial work camp in the South was held in Nashville. Young men and women, of whom several were Negroes, have lived for two summers on the campus of Fisk University and worked at the 18th Street Youth Center, which is in a neighborhood in transition from white to Negro, and at other Negro community centers. The playgrounds which they built would perhaps have been achieved without the help of the campers, but the pattern of fellowship which they demonstrated has the creative potentialities of a mustard seed.

Of this camp one girl wrote: "I would like to show other white people that they are not only cheating the Negro by keeping him in subjection but are also cheating the white man by losing some of the great things the Negro could contribute if given a greater chance." And another: "Certainly I have a greater realization that progress in race relations is a long slow process involving much education and change of attitude. It seems that 'the hand cannot be forced' without 'giving the heart', and I have come to believe more surely in non-violence as a basis of social progress in tension problems."

In Chicago work campers have redecorated an old house to be used as a community center and have helped Negro tenants in depressed areas to repair and paint their run-down and shabby dwellings. High school boys and girls at Paoli, Pennsylvania, worked with a group of twelve Negro families on remodeling the houses they had bought cooperatively. Plans have been made for the building of a roadway and a community center in the coming summer. In Baltimore, besides reconditioning an old house to



Work campers and members of the local community worked together to build Flanner House, Negro Community center in Indianapolis, Indiana



The library at Penn-Craft, Pennsylvania mining community where 50 families, of whom 5 are Negro, helped one another to build attractive stone and frame houses

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The Placement Service of the AFSC Race Relations Committee seeks to find positions for Negroes of superior promise and proven ability in fields not traditionally open to them



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Packing toys collected at the AFSC clothing storeroom for shipment to Japanese American children in relocation centers



Members of a peace caravan attend a training institute before beginning a summer program of peace education with an emphasis on the race question



AFSC work camps offer ways in which young men and women may give of their strength and good-will for the benefit of others and in so doing may see with their own eyes the conditions under which less privileged groups must live

be used as a Friends Center in a "checkerboard" district, work campers successfully held the first interracial daily vacation Bible school ever attempted in that city.

Work camps on the West Coast have benefited Chinese and Japanese Americans. Part of a hospital building badly out of repair in San Francisco's Chinatown was made usable. Week-end work camps in Seattle helped returning Japanese American evacuees to cut their grass, wash their windows, repair houses, and paint out undesirable signs put there by hooligan elements. The Southern California Branch annually holds an interracial camp for children, in which Caucasian, Negro, Mexican, and Japanese American children play, study, work and worship together in a beautiful spot in the High Sierras called "Quaker Meadows."

PEACE CARAVANS

Besides the work camps, some of the peace caravans sponsored by the AFSC focus their attention upon the race question. Caravans are made up of smaller groups than the work camps and are concerned with direct education for peace.

Detroit was chosen as the headquarters of one caravan both because Detroit is a hotbed of racial antagonisms and because the Michigan Council of Churches cooperates in sponsoring the enterprise. For two succeeding summers four girls of four different racial backgrounds have spent a week in each of seven children's camps outside Detroit, among which were a Y. W. C. A. camp, a Negro camp, and a Jewish Fresh Air Camp. They use their skills of crafts, first aid, swimming, and singing to win the confidence of the children, and from there go on to bring up race attitudes for direct and remedial discussion. As might be expected the sight of their own happy companionship is more persuasive than even the wisest things that they say. After the first summer some of the white camps, at the instigation of the children themselves, began to admit Negro children.

A caravan in Pittsburgh in the summer of 1944 occupied itself with racial attitudes in a specialized field. Working closely with the Urban League, the five white caravaners made a survey of the 25 hospitals in the Pittsburgh area and their racial policies. They had a great many careful and patient interviews with people in key positions, explaining, inquiring, suggesting. Some of the people with whom they talked had closed their minds to the subject; others had never thought about it, never realized the difficulties that beset the Negro girl who would like to be a nurse but cannot be admitted to a training school, and the Negro doctor who has successfully finished medical school but can find no hospital in which to interne. As a direct result of the caravan's efforts, two of the Pittsburgh hospitals have opened their doors to Negro cadet nurses and internes, and there are indications that others may follow once the precedent has been set.

CIVILIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

Although the Civilian Public Service Camps were never chosen by the Service Committee as a vehicle for theories of interracial cooperation, they have nevertheless demonstrated the principle that people who come together to do a common work learn to know and respect one another as individuals and to live together in harmony. In *Fellowship* for February, 1946, Wilson A. Head writes: "In the midst of this confusion and antagonism, another small group has been making its contribution to the building of a society in which racism will have no place—the nation's conscientious objectors in Civilian Public Service camps and units throughout the country."

He goes on to point out that at the camp at Big Flats, N. Y., which was the reception center for Friends CPS, there were at one time 150 men, of whom seven were Negroes, two Nisei, two Parsee Zoroastrians. Four of the white men were southerners. An unspecified number were Jewish. All of the men took part in the activities of the camps without regard to differences in race or religion. Two Negroes have been chairmen of camp meetings. One was an assistant crew leader with white men working under his direction. Both Negroes and Jews served on the camp's education and personnel committees. The result Wilson Head calls "a pattern of living unique in its implications for those who work to build a world in which all men can live without conflict."

The race testimony of Friends CPS, while notable and significant, has not, however, been complete, owing to Selective Service's refusal to approve the assignment of Negroes to Southern camps, even though the camps themselves requested such assignments. Most of the men, however, felt very deeply about the question of interracial relationships and lost no opportunity to make their position clear.

In one southern camp the men established a "school" for studying racial problems. They invited Negroes in the neighborhood to various camp entertainments and lectures. Another camp, also in the south, gave an informal party to the graduating class of a Negro high school. This friendly act stirred up so much opposition among local conservatives that the camp was ordered to conform to traditional usage or "get out." Because the camp's work project directly benefited the Negro community and it was believed that there would be other opportunities for improving the relationship between the races, the camp decided to "conform", although a few members who could not accept the compromise asked for and received transfer.

In the hospitals and mental institutions to which CPS men were assigned on detached service, policies varied, but in more than one instance the CPS men with their ideas of interracial cooperation brought about a change in

the attitude of the administration. A hospital which previously had neither employed Negro attendants nor accepted C. O. parolees from prison has taken on some Negroes who are parolees as well. A large mental hospital recently added two Negroes to the CPS unit there, an innovation in its policy. CPS men assigned to a school for Negro delinquent boys opposed segregation of Negro staff members and succeeded in obtaining equality of housing for all.

Although there was some discussion among CPS men as to whether they ought to divert their strength from their primary struggle against war and conscription to the secondary problem of race, many of them were convinced that the two together were interlocking parts of the great fundamental issue of the right relations between men.

JAPANESE AMERICANS

The enforced exodus of 112,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast is generally accepted as "America's worst mistake." The confusion and fright of that hasty uprooting, the misery of the years in crowded quarters behind barbed wires, the serious property loss to a hard-working and thrifty people, and the second forced adjustment for many when the camps were closed out, are now matters of history. The spirit with which the greater number of the victims of this tragedy met it abundantly proved their loyalty and facilitated their adjustment to the new communities in which they were relocated.

The AFSC through the work of a full-time secretary and through its branch offices in Chicago and the West Coast, undertook to help in three ways: personal services, relocation, and interpretation.

The visiting of the internees in the camps, help with storage of precious personal possessions, the distribution of Christmas gifts and layettes, were ways of reminding the people behind the barbed wire fences that they still had friends in the nation which had suddenly turned so harsh a face upon them.

The National Japanese American Student Relocation Council, established in 1942, by the AFSC and a number of other church and social bodies, placed over 3,000 students in more than 500 institutions of higher learning.

To ease the transition between the camp and the new community and to encourage evacuees to take part in normal American life instead of withdrawing into "little Tokyos", the AFSC operated hostels in Chicago, Des Moines, Cincinnati, Pasadena, and Los Angeles. The hostel method, used first by the Service Committee to help Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, has proved to have positive values for people who are disoriented, and disheartened. Cooperation in household tasks keeps the cost down and

accelerates friendships among the guests; directors skilled in counseling help with permanent housing and employment as well as more personal problems. Opportunities are created for natural, easy encounters with members of the community, and every effort is made to break down barriers of race and creed. The religious "concern" which underlies the whole structure makes for a friendly atmosphere and one in which wise long-term decisions may be reached without any sense of pressure. The Japanese American hostels in the East and Mid-West are now closed, but those in southern California continue a needed service. Evergreen Hostel in Los Angeles, in which the Presbyterian Church cooperates with the AFSC, regularly accommodates 90 guests a night.

Wherever the Committee works, but especially on the West Coast, it has attempted to interpret the Japanese Americans to the community. Much of the prejudice against them was artificially whipped up and can be allayed by the persistent expression of a reasonable point of view and the example of friendly action. With the closing of the camps and the return of most of the evacuees to the West Coast, the AFSC full-time secretary for Japanese Americans has been released to do other work. Local Friends groups carry on programs of fellowship and interpretation in communities where there is need of such activities. The Nisei on the AFSC staff and in the summer projects continue to make a valuable contribution to the work of the Committee.

JEWISH PEOPLE

Properly speaking, prejudice against the Jews should not be included in a report on race relations, for there is no race to which all Jews belong; it is their religion which makes them Jewish. "Jews are people who practice the Jewish religion. They are of all races, even Negro and Mongolian. Physically they resemble the populations among whom they live."*

The Nazi policy, however, defined as Jewish all those who had one or more grandparents who professed the Jewish religion. Most of the refugees from Germany who came to this country in the 1930's came as Jews by this definition, although many of them were actually Christians or agnostics or so-called Aryans who had married people of Jewish faith. The Service Committee's contacts with the Jewish group have been of two kinds, work for "involuntary Jews" who were refugees and work with followers of the Jewish religion on common concerns.

The story of the refugees, the long, agonized Odyssey from concentration camp through the entanglements of bureaucratic red tape to the bewildered arrival in a huge and apparently indifferent land, has often been told and now is often forgotten in the shock of the colossal sagas of death

* Benedict and Waltfish, *The Races of Mankind*, p. 17.

and flight and destruction that have come out of the war. Although the crisis stage has passed, the Service Committee's work with the refugees in this country nevertheless goes on, though in reduced form. Services to individuals, fellowship parties, the friendship center formerly at Powell House and now seeking new headquarters in New York, and the summer vacation hostel at Sky Island fill a necessary role in helping to fit these troubled people for a normal life of activity and hope.

At the time of the arrival of the refugees in this country the AFSC was active in combatting distrust with proven facts. That, for instance, instead of the "millions" that were being freely rumored, only a few thousands were coming, in numbers well under the quota; that instead of displacing American workers they actually in many cases started new industries that made jobs for Americans; that their talents as physicians, scientists, musicians, psychologists, and teachers were a great contribution to the life of this nation. "Refugee Facts", the most authoritative analysis of the refugee situation, was made possible by Quaker and Jewish cooperation in both research and distribution.

The AFSC has a long history of cooperation with Jewish agencies. The American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee for Service Abroad, known as the JDC, was started just three years before the AFSC and, like the Service Committee, believes in going beyond temporary relief and helping people to help themselves. They first came together in the early 1920's in Russia and Poland, where both were working first on famine relief and later on village and farm reconstruction. In certain places where a Jewish organization was not allowed to go, the Service Committee's workers were supplied with JDC funds to help people whom the JDC wished to reach. In general that has been the pattern of their collaboration. In cases of emergency, however, funds and services have been freely interchanged. After 1933 when great numbers of desperate people clamored at the doors of the Friends Centers in Vienna and Berlin, the financial contribution of the JDC made possible much of the work done by Friends.

In December 1938 three Friends went to Germany to discuss with the Nazi government the treatment of the Jews. As a result of their conversations they secured permission to send commissioners to work with local Jewish committees already in existence in Germany. These commissioners, who belonged to the Service Committee staff, helped Jews, both religious and "involuntary", who were stranded at borders where a neutral party was most useful, gave assistance with visas, and counseled distracted families who were trying to make their escape and plan their future. The expenses of these commissioners were paid by the JDC and the arrangement lasted till the outbreak of the war in September 1939.

The Central Location Index, in which the AFSC and JDC and six other agencies cooperate in searching out the whereabouts of refugees for their anxious friends and relatives in this country, is yet another example of the kind of harmonious cooperation that is constantly taking place when people of different creeds or races work together, not on the question of their own relations to each other, but on a wider service for others.

Besides the cooperation between the AFSC and Jewish groups, a number of Jewish persons have been included in AFSC projects in this country, and the Committee always welcomes their help and seeks their fellowship.

The question of minorities is one of the great historic issues of our time. There is no single, simple way to settle it. It demands large action by government and continuous, small, creative, reconciling action by individuals. Among the many organizations directing their efforts toward constructive solutions, the American Friends Service Committee is but one, and a small one. The actual amount that it has been able to do to alleviate the conditions of people who are penalized for their race or religion or to ease hearts over-charged with resentment, loneliness or fear, is no more than a drop in a mammoth bucket.

No serious attempt, however, to improve the feeling between one race and another or one religion and another is negligible; no procedure which has been used successfully in strained human relations is unimportant. In a spirit of exploration tempered with humility, the AFSC makes this report upon its experiences of the method of creative fellowship in service for others as applied to the field of interracial relations.

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